**Diocesan Synod Presidential Address**

**July 2022**

What a week it has been! Record temperatures causing us to swelter and seek the shade, but also a government unable to withstand the heat and now in meltdown. Who knows what the next few weeks will bring? Many hopeful Prime Ministerial candidates are promising much but can they realistically deliver?

Some people warm to new possibilities and enjoy the prospect of the unknown. However, many of us struggle with change and transition. We prefer the familiar, to know what to expect, to be able to plan and prepare. These last few years have been particularly hard therefore with the amount of change we have had to handle both within the world and in the Church.

I and others have just come back from General Synod where we engaged in debates on Ukraine; assisted suicide; carbon net zero ambitions; and the concerning issue of pornography and its accessibility to children and young people. We also looked at the shape of the Church, how it needs to address areas of greater inclusivity particularly in relation to disabled people and youth; how we fund the future of ministry training; and how we are doing in relation to our safeguarding objectives.

In the heat of debate it was clear that we have the desire and willingness to become the Church for today’s world but we have a long journey to make in order to accomplish that.

On July 26th the Lambeth Conference begins. Its theme is ‘God’s Church for God’s World’ and over 650 Bishops from across the Anglican Communion will meet to explore what it means for us to respond to the needs of a 21st century world. Our different contexts will inform our conversations as we hear the stories of brothers and sisters from around the world. We may feel this present heat is rather more than we can bear but what implications does the changing climate have in other parts of our world?

Our Zambian sisters and brothers can share much with us about the experience of damaging climate change. We are really fortunate that we have 4 of them coming from Zambia to Bath and Wells for a few days before the Lambeth Conference. There will be opportunities for them to connect with link partners across the diocese and on Saturday 23rd here at Flourish House you can come and meet and greet them over tea here in Flourish House at 4.30pm. (For catering purposes do let us know if you are coming!!). On Sunday 24th it is our annual Zambia Sunday, and the Zambian Bishops will be worshipping with us in churches across the diocese. Please join us in prayer for them, our partnership link, and indeed the whole Communion, as we look to the future.

Tonight, we gather to look at our own future as Church, here in the diocese of Bath and Wells. We have just heard from Bishop Michael and we look forward to welcoming him and Lizzie and the children amongst us. It is going to be an exciting new chapter in the life of the diocese. As you have heard, Archbishop Justin has given him a Charge and I want to read some of those words as we begin our evening together. They have particular significance as we are reminded again of the importance of building a safer world for all.

***‘As Diocesan Bishop of Bath and Wells you are called*** *to lead the Diocese in discerning its particular vision for God’s ministry and mission, following His call to care for the sick, the hungry, the imprisoned, the stranger and the orphan around us and, in so doing, proclaiming the Good News of the God who came and lived among us that we might know and share His love for us here on Earth. Jesus who loved all alike, who counted tax collectors and fishermen as friends invites you to bring people to Christ’s table. He calls us to build a church where each living stone is valued.*

*As Jesus welcomed the children, the sick and the isolated into His family, you are called to lay a place for both the young and the elderly, those who are poor and those who are wealthy, those whom society loves and those whom society despises alike, and to be a safe place where God’s children may gather, in all our glorious diversity and difference, and celebrate the image of God in one another. At this critical time in our stewardship of God’s creation, may you have creativity to ensure God’s people are characterized by the same love for this world that caused our creator to give His son.*

*In the midst of much fear and uncertainty, may you encourage the diocese to be courageous in the gospel as the first disciples were, confident in their witness as St Paul was, bold in their hopes and faith-filled in their dreams of joining in God’s work to make the Kingdom of Heaven known here on Earth. May you draw those you serve into ever deeper relationship, from individuals to global communities, remembering that Christ is both an intimate friend as well as King of all creation, leaving out no one in His pursuit of love and mercy….*

*…. scripture calls us to ‘speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable’ [Prov 31:8], to challenge cultures of hierarchy and deference, and create a space that honours the trust and hope that people place in the church of God. You are called to be a seeker and speaker of truth and justice and ensure that the Diocese of Bath and Wells is a place where children and vulnerable adults are safe, and the highest standards of safeguarding are upheld.’*

Challenging words for our new Bishop and for us! Because we are in this together! Archbishop Justin’s words were calling +Michael to encourage each of us to be **courageous**, **confident, and bold** in sharing the good news of Christ and in building the kingdom of God. And that will mean change whether we like it or not. We will need to make space for others at the table; become simpler in our structures and processes; and humbler in recognising when we have got things wrong and need to ask forgiveness.

Tonight, I hope you will be encouraged by hearing of the progress made in areas of safeguarding. I hope too you will catch sight of shoots of growth and hope, amongst the very clear challenges, as we hear the annual report and prepare for next year’s budget. Much has been achieved despite our reduced resources and we have ambitions to do more. Thank you to those of you who joined in the Day of Prayer the day after +Michael’s Confirmation of Election and for those who, this past week, have joined in praying for our children, young people, and our schools. It is through our prayer that we will see God’s power at work in and through us. The Archbishop’s Charge began and ended with the call to pray. May that mark our daily lives too.

A couple of final personal words from me. I want to thank all of you for your care, support and prayer through these last couple of years. We may have been short on people and money as a diocese, but not on love! Thank you! Thank you to Rosemary for joining us at a time when we needed her wisdom and experience as a Diocesan Secretary. You have been a gift from God to us and we want you to know that.

As you will hear shortly, +Michael has delegated his episcopal diocesan responsibilities to me, in a similar way as +Peter did. This means that until his installation in the Cathedral on November 12th you will still see me very much in evidence. However, I shall be taking some sabbatical leave from November 14th for a couple of months, with a further couple of months deferred until after Easter when Howard is due some study leave. I’m looking forward to it!!

So, thank you for all the ways in which we have pulled together and prayed together. And as our passage from Philippians reminds us…

*‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice…. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’*

With love and thankfulness

+Ruth

13th July 2022